

THE FIRST AND THE LAST

(Rev. 1:11)

by Leland Earls

"This is the revelation of Jesus Christ—His unveiling of the divine mysteries. God gave it to Him to disclose and make known to His bond servants certain things which must shortly come to pass in their entirety. And He sent and communicated it through His angel (messenger) to his bond servant John, who has testified to and vouched for all that he saw (in his visions), the Word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ... I (John) was in the Spirit—rapt in His power—on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice like the calling of a war trumpet, saying, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the FIRST AND THE LAST. Write promptly what you see (your vision) in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia." (Rev. 1:1-2, 10-11 Amplified Version).

Please prayerfully read and meditate on the above words. It is important to understand that the book of Revelation contains "divine mysteries" which had not been previously unveiled - either by Jesus Himself, or anyone else. Furthermore, to

make the matter emphatic, the glorified Christ characterizes Himself in this final revelation as the "Alpha and the Omega, the FIRST and the LAST." (Rev. 1:11). "Alpha" is the first letter in the Greek alphabet and "Omega" is the last. Letters make up syllables and words. Words communicate ideas. Thus Jesus was emphatically declaring that He alone (as THE WORD - John 1:1, 11; Rev. 19:11) has the first and the last "word" on matters of Divine Revelation.

Why is this so important? Because so many Bible students seek to find in the epistles of Paul, Peter, John, etc. the "final word" on various aspects of Christian truth. Certainly the apostles have made a contribution to our understanding. But only in the words of Jesus in the Gospels and the book of Revelation do we have the FIRST and LAST authoritative "word" on all spiritual truth. And all the revelations of Jesus are FOUNDED in that which the mighty Yahweh-Spirit had made known to Moses and the other prophets in the Old Testament. "To the law (Moses) and to the testimony (of the other prophets)! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Is. 8:20).

[Does Paul Contradict the Teachings of a Two-Stage Translation?]

In order to illustrate this principle, I will now deal with a couple of questions submitted by a Canadian reader regarding apparent contradictions between statements made by the apostle Paul, and that which is founded in the revelation of Jesus Christ, concerning end-time truths. The questions are as follows:

1. Paul says in I Cor. 15:51 that "we shall all be changed" at the time of translation. This appears to contradict the word in your book "[Let My People Go](#) " that only those who have attained the proper maturity by the end of the tribulation shall be changed while the rest remain on earth to enter the earth-based Kingdom. What is your solution for this?
2. Paul indicates in I Thess. 4:15 that the translation of the living ones does not precede the resurrection of the dead. Despite the abundance of evidence to scripturally support otherwise the taking of a "first fruits sheaf" before the tribulation, how do you reconcile the apparent contradiction?

First, I will go to the heart of the matter and answer briefly the above questions. Secondly, since Paul's statements quoted in the above questions deal with climactic events to take place at the close of this age, I will go into the Scriptural pattern for the "harvest" and show how Paul's statements fit into this pattern. Third and finally, I will seek to probe somewhat deeper into Paul's understanding and draw out some points which perhaps you had not noticed before.

[The Incompleteness of Paul's End Time Teaching]

First, Paul was honest enough to admit that he understood only "in part," and as "in a mirror, dimly" (I Cor. 13:12), Therefore it is impossible to build a pattern of end-time events on the writings of Paul alone. Read again what I have already written in the first part of this article. I repeat, there is only ONE who has the "first word" and "last word" on all divinely revealed truth: Jesus Christ. Whatever was revealed to Spirit-tutored men such as Peter, Paul, etc., was but partial and incomplete; only "pieces" of the over-all puzzle and will not be contradictory if fitted into the proper place.

I point out in my "The Three Comings of Jesus" booklet that even Jesus' words in the gospels do not give a complete picture of end-time events. For example, in John 5:29, Jesus speaks of the resurrection of some unto life, and others unto judgment. Based on that statement, we might conclude that both resurrections would take place at the same time, but according to Rev. 20:4-6 there is more than one resurrection, separated by at least a thousand years. To give additional revelation that had not been given before was the very purpose of Jesus sending a special messenger to John on the isle of Patmos (Rev. 1:1). If Paul was given the "last word" on end-time prophetic events, why would John receive additional details from a special messenger long after Paul's ministry was over (ponder that much until its truth has sunk deeply into your consciousness). As to Paul saying in I Cor. 15:15, that "we all" shall be changed, we must understand that there are different categories of Christians. I will seek to show as we proceed that we need to understand WHO Paul is including when he uses such pronouns as "we" "our" and "us."

[The Harvest Parables: Foundational Paradigm to Understanding the End Time "Rapture"]

We need to understand God's end-time pattern for the "harvest" if we are going to fit the pieces into the overall picture. Jesus emphatically declared in Mt. 13:39 that "the harvest is the end of the age (not "world," as it is in the King James version). It is quite common for the word "harvest" to be used to denote the "winning of souls" to Christ. From a limited perspective, I believe this is a legitimate analogy. However, scripturally speaking, we are dealing with epochal events which consummate six thousand years of human history, and open a new cycle and dimension of God's dealings with the earth and its inhabitants. The very metaphor of a "harvest" implies that seeds have been planted, and have grown to maturity over a process of time under the right conditions. Then follows the reaping and threshing that they might be transported to another place. Even so, the Lord's harvest involves the planting of His word-seed in the soil of human hearts (Mt. 13:19,23) followed by the right conditions for growth *to* maturity, in order that a great multitude of humans will be prepared for transport to another realm (the heavenly Kingdom) by having their physical bodies glorified at the close of this age.

- [Three Stages of Salvation Revealed in the Parable of the Sower]

In several of His parables, Jesus used the figure of the harvest to portray truths of His spiritual Kingdom. Mt. 13:3-9 records the parable of the Sower and Jesus gives the interpretation in Mt. 13:18-23. I will not go into detail, but simply state that the parable speaks of the different kinds of soils (human hearts) and the different degrees of response to the Word of God, typified by the 30, 60 and 100 fold. In Mark's account of the same parable, Jesus follows with the statement, "Do you not understand THIS parable? How then will you understand all parables?" (Mk. 4:13). In other words, this is the KEY parable. It unlocks the other parables.

For my purpose here, I will just focus on one verse - Mt. 13:23, where Jesus states that the seed on the good ground brought forth "some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty fold." Thus declaring that there are THREE groups or categories of Christians and each of these three groups has a different destiny. This can be established and amplified on by numerous other teachings of Jesus, as well as seen in many pattern truths in the Old Testament. That is beyond the scope, however, of what I want to cover in this article, I will just quote one more parable given by Jesus to focus on the "maturity" question raised by the Canadian reader. I will quote in part Mark 4:26-29: "The Kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. . . for the earth yields crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But, when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." Notice the three groups again. The "blade"

corresponds to the 30 fold Christian, "the head" (but still green and partially filled) corresponds to the 60 fold, and the "full" (ripe) grain in the head corresponds to the 100 fold. Not only do we have pictured here the three categories of Christians, but also three stages of progress or growth.

In order to better understand the end time harvest picture, and just WHO is to be "harvested," I want to share briefly what takes place in the life of a believer in Christ in each of these progressive stages. The "thirty fold" or "blade" Christian is an intellectual believer only. Those in this category give "mental assent" to the truths of Christ, and believe that they should at least TRY to live somewhat of a respectable life. This group forms the bulk of church people in the world today. But there is no "seed" in a blade; therefore the thirty-fold have NOT been "born of the incorruptible seed" of Jesus Christ (I Pet. 1:23). Theirs is but a provisional salvation, conditioned upon their continued going TOWARDS Christ. Such, said Jesus, would by no means be cast out (John 6:37). However, they can (and many do) "drawback to perdition" (He. 10:39) returning to their former ways (II Pet. 2:20-22). The blades who fail to follow through are pictured in the parable of the Sower as those which "sprang up," but were either "scorched out" by tribulation or persecution (Mt. 13:5-6, 20-21) or "choked out" by the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches (Mt. 13:7, 22).

The "sixty-fold" are the HEART receivers (John 1:12-13). They have come to a deep seated repentance and have invited Christ to "come in" (Rev. 3:20) being "born anew" (John 3:3) of His deathless life seed, which is engrafted into the soul (James 1:21) causing them to pass from death to life (John 5:24). Theirs is a secured salvation which can never be lost (John 10:28-29). But pause now and THINK! This second stage in Mark 4:28 is called the "head" (or "ear" as it is rendered the King James Version). But in the context the clear implication is that the head of grain is yet green and not fully developed. It is not ready to be harvested (removed) from the earth realm (either by translation or out-resurrection) into the heavenly or glorified realm. The salvation of the thirty-fold or sixty-fold groups has nothing to do with heaven. Theirs is but to be preserved to remain on earth, or to be resurrected back to earth to continue to progress in God's plan. Their harvest from physical to glorified bodies is yet far into the future (a thousand years or more). The exception will be those now living who let the Lord prepare them in the coming tribulation for the harvest at the close of this age, now near at hand.

It is the hundred-fold who have the potential to become the full (ripe) grain in the head (Mk. 4:28) Christian, ready for harvest. That which introduces one into the hundredfold estate is the Holy Spirit baptism (Mt. 3:11, John 1:33). No, I am NOT referring to speaking in tongues, although that gift may or may not accompany the experience. The one who is immersed in the fire of God's Spirit does not need a

special sign as an evidence of something that is in itself a life-transforming encounter with the living Christ. When properly understood and received according to the Divine pattern and intent, this infusion sanctifies the human tabernacle with the glory of the Lord (Ex. 29:43), purging the heart from bondage to carnality, being the "circumcision made without hands by the putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ" (Col. 2:11).

This estate of Spirit-sanctification, however, must be maintained by whole-hearted devotion to Christ and separation *to* Him. There must also be continued testing, proving, overcoming, and spiritual growth before being approved for the harvest. That approval is spoken of in James 1:12, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of Life which the Lord has promised to those that love Him." That "CROWN of life" is life on the glorified plane, in contrast to the earthly. Read I Cor. 9:24-27, and note that Paul indicates he is "running" and "fighting" for that crown, lest he should be disqualified and lose out on that prize.

[The Two-Stage Rapture Defined by the Harvest Principle]

Look with me briefly at a parable in Mt. 13:24-30. Jesus speaks of the tares (the counterfeit) growing together with the grain until the harvest. Then the tares are gathered in bundles to be burned (in the vials of wrath at the close of the tribulation), but the wheat is gathered into the heavenly barn. Notice it is only the ripened wheat (100 fold) that is taken, not the blades (30 fold) or the partially filled green heads (60 fold). Do you go out to your garden or field and pick blades that are just sprouting up? Or pluck half-filled ears or heads to take into your house? Or do you wait for the ripe grain, corn, etc. to harvest for use? Is not God at least as smart as man? You answer that! The ripe grain (100 fold) will be gathered into the heavenly barn (kingdom) in two groups. First the "first fruits" at the beginning of the tribulation, and then the "main harvest" at the close of the tribulation.

This two-fold harvest is graphically portrayed in Rev. 14:1-5 and 14:14-16. In between (14:6-13) there are three angels who give three proclamations relating to the great tribulation conditions:

1. the preaching of the everlasting gospel,
2. the fall of Babylon, and
3. the warning against being subservient to the beast and his image.

Notice that only after the main harvest has been gathered (14:14-16) do we see the vine of the earth (the wicked) cast into the "wine press of the wrath of God" (14:17-20). This encompasses the seven vials of wrath described in Rev. 16:1-21.

[Paul's Limited Rapture Teaching Seen within the Harvest Paradigm]

With the foregoing background in the foundational teachings of Jesus, I believe we can now fit Paul's "in part" understanding into the whole picture, keeping in mind that when Paul wrote, the complete picture of the end-time harvest had not yet been given by the One who is "The First and the Last" (Rev. 1:11). What Paul writes in I Thess. 4:13-18 must be placed at the end of the tribulation when the main harvest takes place, for at that time a great multitude of the elect (100 fold) will be glorified, both of those whose bodies are "asleep in Jesus" and those who are alive and remain (having survived the great tribulation). In the chronology of the harvest in Rev. 14, this would be encompassed in 14:14-16.

It becomes evident by the visions given to John in the book of Revelation that there will be martyrs during the great tribulation. I point this out here because it relates to the main harvest picture. In Rev. 20:4-5 John says, "And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, AND I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they LIVED and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. This is the FIRST resurrection."

Now please notice carefully. The first statement in Rev. 20:4 would refer to those translated and glorified without experiencing death. Then in the next statement in the same verse, John sees the SOULS of those who had been martyred; that is, he saw these saints clothed in their saved (preserved) soul bodies, before their physical bodies are restored to them (compare Rev. 6:9). But in the next statement he says, "and they LIVED." The Amplified version says, "and they LIVED AGAIN." This would refer to the resurrection and glorification of their physical bodies. Then in Rev. 20:5, John says, "This is the FIRST resurrection." It is obvious there can be more resurrections after the first, but certainly none before. The context of Rev. 20:4-6 clearly shows that this first resurrection comes AFTER the tribulation. I point this out because of the teaching of many evangelical fundamentalists that the resurrection and translation which Paul describes in I Thess. 4:13-15 takes place at the beginning of the tribulation. Impossible!! Otherwise the resurrection described in Rev. 20:4 would NOT be the first! This becomes conclusive, as far as I am concerned, that Paul's Thessalonian passage must be placed at the end of the tribulation. It also reinforces

the fact that the "first fruits" of Rev. 14:1-5 are to be taken from among the LIVING only.

[Prophetic Significance of the Jewish Harvest Process]

Before I comment further on some of Paul's statements, I want to amplify on God's pattern for the end-time harvest as it is portrayed in Israel's natural harvest; for the natural is a type of the spiritual.

I know that I have written on these matters before, but I don't recall ever setting forth a step by step complete scenario of the end-time harvest, so here goes! First, just a brief summary of the progression of the natural harvest. In the land of Palestine, the harvest began in the spring with the ripening of the barley. This took place in the month of Nisan, the first month of their religious calendar, during which the feast of Passover was held at Jerusalem. As a part of the Passover "rites," God commanded the High Priest to cut out a sheaf of the ripening barley and present it as a first-fruits offering *to* the Lord, "waving" it before the Lord in a special ceremony. Also, in the spring, the "latter rains" fell, which were necessary to provide moisture to ripen the crops. This was the second of the two major rainy seasons; the first being the "early rains" which fell in the Fall season to soften the soils for planting (see Lev. 26:4; Jer. 5:24; Ho. 6:3; Joel 2:23; Zech. 10:1; James 5:7). After the intermittent rains of the winter months (with snow in the higher elevations), and the heavy spring (latter) rains, came the heat of the summer which was also necessary for the harvest to ripen in preparation for cutting and threshing. In the late summer there was the vintage which also has great prophetic significance.

Based *on* the above pattern, there are three things that are absolutely necessary for a spiritual harvest *to* God at the close of this age.

(1) A first fruits company ("sheaf") presented *to* God.

In the natural pattern, the harvest could not begin until God received His special portion. Does God give a pattern and then ignore it? No way! We must see the pattern fulfilled in the spiritual harvest at the end of this age exactly as it is portrayed in Rev. 14:1-6. No first fruits - No harvest!

In I Cor. 15:20, Paul speaks of Jesus as the "first fruits of them that slept." Jesus Himself was the first fulfillment of the first fruits wave-sheaf of the barley harvest when He was resurrected and glorified; ascending to the Father and then descending (the "wave" motion). But like so many prophetic types there is more than

one fulfillment. To fulfill the complete pattern, Jesus, as High Priest and Lord of the harvest, must Himself "wave" a first fruits sheaf of them that are alive to begin the end-time harvest. This will take place in the spring of the year, whenever that epochal year arrives. Three and one-half years later (1260 days), in the fall of the year, the main harvest will take place, both of those whose bodies are "asleep in Jesus" and those who are "alive and remain" as Paul states in 1 Thess. 4:15-17.

(2) The "latter rain" outpouring.

The heavy spring rains were necessary to insure enough moisture for growth and harvest. Even so in this end-time, following the translation of the first fruits, there must be a "latter-rain" outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This will be the full and complete Pentecost, of which that described in Acts, chap. 2, was an earnest and foretaste. Read Acts 2:16-21. In his message, Peter quotes from Joel 2:28-32, which declares that when God pours out His Spirit, He will also show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord." This connection of God's outpouring with the climactic events which terminate this age should make us realize that the full Pentecost is yet to come.

This "latter rain" is absolutely necessary for the fulfillment of Jesus' words in Mt. 24:14, "And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." The gospel of the Kingdom which Jesus and His disciples preached was with POWER. Not since the days of the early church has that dimension of supernatural divine endowment been manifested through God's people. When the church compromised and "went in unto Rome" in the early fourth century, God "shorn her hair" (removed the Glory and Power). Yes, there have been "waves" of refreshing and renewal down through the years as the Holy Spirit has moved to accomplish the Lord's purposes in His church. But the FULL ANOINTING will not be restored until the "Second Pentecost." Then will the works of Jesus be done, and even greater works (John 14:12) will be done by chosen vessels. This outpouring will also be needed as millions of "foolish virgins" lay "all on the altar" in order to "buy" the baptismal fire, and then go on to be proven and prepared.

(3) The heat of the summer for maturing, followed by the threshing.

What does this typify in our end-time picture? The great tribulation, which has been designed by God to do a quick purifying and maturing work in Christians. No tribulation; no harvest! Ponder long and prayerfully these statements. Your future destiny in God's Kingdom is at stake, God must turn up the heat! Lest multitudes of Christians "miss the bus" for translation to the glorified realm. Most will miss the first "bus" to glory, for only the elect "first fruits" are scheduled for that trip. But because our gracious God has scheduled a multitude to "take off" on the second trip, He has prepared the "heat" of the great tribulation. Yes, for Christians has He prepared it; not for the world, except in a secondary sense; for God is well able to accomplish multiple purposes in a given period of time.

[Distinguishing the Great Tribulation from the Wrath of God]

One of the grossest errors being perpetuated by many evangelical fundamentalists is that the "great tribulation" and the "wrath of God" are synonymous. They perpetuate this error by a well-known but inaccurate syllogism which goes something like this;

- 1) Because the great tribulation is the same thing as the wrath of God, and
- 2) Since our Redeemer King has delivered us from the wrath to come, therefore
- 3) It is impossible that the church should go through the great tribulation

This conclusion certainly appeals to the emotions, because no one relishes the idea of passing through of any kind of tribulation. The problem with this syllogism, however, is that the first premise is false, thereby rendering the conclusion false. The great tribulation is simply NOT the same as the wrath of God. A careful study of every passage in which the Greek term for tribulation, that is *thlipsis* is found, clearly displays that fact that it is consistently used as a term for the testing, trials, and afflictions of the people of God, which are by a loving heavenly Father to either correct or perfect. The ancient Greeks used the word *thlipsis* to express ideas related to varying degrees of pressure, both external and internal. It is therefore translated by such words as affliction, vexing, harassing, crushing, pressing down and tribulation.

Wherever *thlipsis* is found in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), as well as the Greek of the New Testament, the context must be examined to see whether the tribulation is external, internal or both. It will be

discovered that in no instance does this term ever refer to the wrath of God being poured out on the world. In the Septuagint, *thlipsis* and its cognates are used of several Hebrew terms which all more or less express the troubles and afflictions of life. These Hebrew words, held in common bond by the Greek word for tribulation, are consistently used to describe the various difficulties which are allowed to come upon the people of God.

- [Tribulation: the Threshing Phase of Harvest]

It is beyond the scope of this article to deal with tribulation and how God uses it in the lives of His people. However, there is another aspect of the harvest picture that fits into the scenario I am presenting and symbolically portrays the very idea of tribulation that is before us. Our English word "tribulation" comes from the Latin term *tribulum*, which means "a threshing sledge," as it was used for dragging over grain when pulled by a donkey or an ox. The verb form means to "press down or rub hard." Ripened grain cannot be removed from the earth (realm) and gathered into a barn (higher realm) until it passes through the threshing floor. Threshing floors were placed in the open air, leveled and tramped hard, generally on elevated ground, so that in winnowing, the wind might carry away the chaff.

Threshing was done by oxen driven over the grain to tread out the kernels with their hoofs, or by pulling threshing machines over the grain, made either of planks with stones or bits of iron fastened to the lower surface to make it rough and rendered heavy by some weight on it, or small wagons with low cylindrical wheels like saws. This process of threshing separated the grain from the chaff (husks and broken straw). Then in the evening, when the wind would pick up, the winnowing would take place. Winnowing was done with a broad shovel or wooden fork, with bent prongs. The mass of chaff, straw, and grain was thrown against the wind so that the chaff might be blown away. The chaff and stubble were burned, lest, with the changing wind, it might be blown again among the grain.

As we apply this pattern to our spiritual development, it should become apparent that "threshing floor experiences" (tribulations) are absolutely necessary if we are to be proven "fit" for transference to the coming Kingdom of glory. But let us look at the threshing symbolism a little more closely.

During the growth of each kernel of grain, it is surrounded by a husk. The kernel is IN the husk but not OF it, even as Jesus declares in John 17:16 that those who are HIS, although in the world, are not of the world. Our being IN the world is necessary for our maturing, even as the husk surrounding the grain is necessary until the time for harvest is come. Thus in the life of the saints, the threshing floor stands

for the special dealings of God (He. 12:1-11), which He periodically brings into our lives: the tests, trials, pressures, proving; the disciplines and chastening; that all the "husks" of this world might be separated, no longer "clinging" to us in any way. It is the final phase of the purging process before the "gathering together" unto Jesus (II Thess. 2:1).

The end time import of the threshing process is clearly declared in the prophetic words concerning Jesus as spoken by John the Baptist, recorded in Mt. 3:11-12, "I Indeed baptize you with water *to* repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Here we have a graphic picture of Jesus as the FIRST and the LAST with reference to the course of this present age. He launched the church for its work during this age by pouring out the Holy Spirit fire on the 120 in the upper room (Acts 2:1-4), and He will consummate this age by purging His threshing floor (this earth). This latter will involve a two-fold work:

1. Preparing of the wheat for gathering into the "heavenly barn;" and for most Christians this will include the "threshing floor experience" of the great tribulation.

2. After the gathering of the wheat (by translation), the "chaff" (the wicked of the world) will be destroyed in the fiery wrath of the seven last vials (Rev. 16:1-21). Also summarized in Rev. 6:12-17.

- [Further Distinction between Tribulation and Wrath]

In order to more clearly distinguish between tribulation (*thlipsis*) and the wrath of God, please note closely the following verse; "Immediately AFTER the tribulation (*thlipsis*) of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Mt. 24:29). Here I believe is a helpful clarification between the great tribulation and the wrath of God which comes AFTERwards. The word "wrath" is not used in the above verse. However, the descriptive picture given is in complete harmony with what we read concerning "the great day of His wrath" as given in Rev. 6:12-17. This "wrath" will be accomplished primarily by man's folly returning upon his own head. In the expression in Mt. 24:29, "the powers of the heavens will be shaken," the Greek word for "heavens" is ouranos, from which we get our English word uranium; the fissionable material from which atom bombs are made.

Thus the words in Mt. 24:29 are descriptive of an atomic war. The fact that the sun and moon will be darkened stems from the fact that tons of dirt and debris will be thrown into the atmosphere, obscuring the light of these celestial bodies. Read Rev. 16:1-17 and I think that it is quite apparent that the effects of these vials of wrath are descriptive of atomic explosions and radiation. These matters are covered in my booklet on "[The Shaking of All Things](#) ."

It is very helpful to keep in mind the time patterns involved. The first fruits will be translated in the spring of the year, whenever that momentous year arrives. Then follows the great tribulation of 1260 days (42 months or 3 1/2 years; Rev. 11:2; 12:6), the end of which will come in the Fall of the year on the Jewish feast of Trumpets, when the main harvest host will be translated. This is why Paul especially mentions the "sound of the trumpet" in connection with this momentous event (I Cor. 15:51-52; I Thess. 4:16-17). Now note carefully. [The Feast of] Trumpets falls on the 1st day of the Jewish month Tishri. Two weeks later, on the 15th of Tishri, is the Feast of Tabernacles: the very day Christ will return in power and glory with all His saints (Mt. 24:30, Jude 14). The wrath of God falls during the two weeks between these dates! At the same time the "Marriage Supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:6-10), takes place in Heaven. Then Christ (with His saints - Rev 19:11-16) streaks to earth to both consummate that wrath and stop the madness of atomic warfare, lest "no flesh would be saved." (II Thess. 1:7-8; Mt. 24:21-22).

What? Do you think it takes God a long time to pour out His wrath? In Noah's day it took God just 40 days and nights (Gen. 7:4). He took care of Sodom and Gomorrah in a one-day block buster (Gen. 19:24-29). The ten plagues came upon Egypt in rapid succession (Ex. 7:14; 10:24; 12:29-30). I don't know the over-all time period, but it had to be a relatively short period of time. Are we then to accept the unscriptural notion that it is going to take God 3 1/2 or even 7 years (as some teach) to pour out His wrath in destruction of the wicked at the close of this age? The answer should be obvious.

Now that we know, Scripturally founded, that the wrath of God is poured out after the tribulation, then this affirms what I have also Scripturally shown, that "tribulation," in both Old and New Testament, is for the people of God. It is a part of our "wilderness experience" of testing on this earth, that God might know what is in our hearts, whether we will obey His Word or not (see Deut. 8:1-3); and to help develop in us the character of Jesus Christ, even as Paul declares in Rom. 5:2-5, that we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and not only that, but we also glory in Tribulations (*thlipsis*), knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance character; and character hope." I will leave it there even though more scripture could be used.

- [Wrath Portrayed in the Harvest Pattern]

Although I have already dealt with the final wrath of God, as it is portrayed in the burning of the chaff, there is further symbolism in the harvest picture. After grains had been harvested, later in the summer came the time for the vintage (the gathering of the grapes, as well as their crushing in the wine press in preparation for the making of wine). Each vineyard had its wine press. These presses were generally hewn out of solid rock, consisting of two receptacles or vats placed at different elevations. In the upper one the grapes were trodden, while the lower one received the expressed juice. God uses the process of the treading out of the grapes as a symbolic picture of His taking vengeance on the wicked. Grape juice is symbolic in the scriptures of mortal human blood.

In the harvest chapter, Rev. 14, we see the exact pattern that I have presented to you. In 14:14-16, Jesus Christ, with a sickle in His hands, reaps the harvest of the earth (the ripened grain of His saints). This takes place at the close of the tribulation. Then, immediately following, in 14:17-20, an angel with another sickle is seen (14:17). Then we read; "And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire (this will be atomic fire), and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe. So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God." (Rev. 14:18-19). We see Jesus consummating this wrath as He returns, with His robe symbolically "dipped in blood" as He "treads the wine press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." (Rev. 19:11-15). Compare Isaiah 63; 1-6.

Thus we see that God's entire plan for the closing stages of this age are conformed to the pattern of Israel's natural harvest in the land of Palestine, and also "choreographed" to dovetail with the major festival dates of Israel's religious calendar. Hallelujah! How beautiful is God's plan when all of the pieces of the puzzle are fitted together.

[Paul's Changing Perspective on the Resurrection]

In seeking to answer the questions proposed by the Canadian reader concerning statements by Paul, I have been seeking to show how they cannot be understood apart from fitting them into the Master plan given by the FIRST and the LAST (Rev. 1:11). Where any statement by Paul seems to be in contradiction, then a closer look at what Paul has said must be taken and evaluated accordingly. We have

already assessed the fact that Paul understood only "in part;" he did not have the complete picture of God's end time plan. Now I want to proceed further and deal with two other matters. First, there was a progression in Paul's understanding as seen in His earlier epistles as compared to later ones. Second, in certain passage when Paul uses such personal pronouns as "we" "us" or "our," we must realize that Paul was referring to himself and to those in his own category.

It is generally agreed by Biblical scholars that I & II Thessalonians were the earliest of Paul's epistles. It also seems evident that when writing these epistles, Paul believed that he would be alive at the time of the Lord's second coming. This is why he states in I Thess. 4:17 that, "We who are alive and remain will be caught up to meet the Lord." I and II Corinthians were also written early in Paul's ministry. And in similar fashion Paul spoke of the coming of the Lord and declared "we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (I Cor.15:51).

However, when we consider the Philippian epistle, which was written later, as Paul was imprisoned in Rome, he expresses no thought of being alive at the Lord's coming. Instead, he is looking forward to attaining to what he calls an "out-resurrection out from among the dead" (literal rendering of the Greek of Phil. 3:11). As one who knew God's plan for a future resurrection of ALL—the just and the unjust (Acts 24:16), based on Jesus words in John 5:29—Paul also knew that there was nothing he needed to do to eventually experience a resurrection of his physical body. The resurrection was a SURE THING! What Paul was hoping to attain to, as expressed in Phil. 3:11, was something special and exclusive, for he says, "IF by any means I might attain." Paul knew at this time that he was not going to live until the Lord's coming, and he wanted to be sure that he would be among those qualified to participate in a resurrection BEFORE other resurrections, and also to a HIGHER plane—glorified life.

As Paul expressed his hope in Phil. 3:11, he used the Greek preposition ek two times, which means "out from" or "out from among." It is first used as a prefix to the Greek word anastasia, meaning "resurrection," and should be translated "OUT-resurrection." It is then used again just before the Greek word nekron, meaning "dead," and together they should be translated "out from the dead." The latter expression implies the resurrection of some while others are left behind; that is, a special resurrection, which is called in Rev. 20:5, the FIRST resurrection, and which obviously must be followed by one or more later resurrections. The "OUT-resurrection" expression (ek-anastasis), I believe, indicates NOT a resurrection back to this earth, but rather OUT FROM this earth into the glorified life.

The entire context of Phil. 3:1-21 is extremely important and affirms that which is clearly established in the teachings of Jesus that there are different categories

of Christians. As you read of Paul's desire and willingness to go "all out" to WIN a certain "prize," it becomes obvious that he is aspiring to something more than just believing in Jesus (the 30-fold) or even being "born again" (the 60-fold). It is the UP-ward call (3:12-14) to the "summit" that Paul seeks to "lay hold of." This is the 100-fold who will be called UP to inherit the heavenly Kingdom and glory as co-heirs with Christ in His coming Kingdom.

It is in the above context that Paul states in Phil. 3:20 that "our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body." In such passages as this, as well as numerous others in Paul's epistles, when he uses such personal pronouns as "we" "us" and "our," he is referring to himself and those in his own category. After reading the entire context of Phil. 3:1-21, if you can honestly say that you have "this mind" of the mature (3:15) and are going "all out" as Paul was to "attain" the prize (3:11-14), then perhaps you can include yourself in the "our" and the "we" of Phil. 3:20 (the "heavenly citizenship").

We do not have to appeal to epistles to determine that not all believers will be glorified when Jesus comes. That is established by the FIRST and the LAST. But epistles, rightly read, will not contradict the basics from Jesus words. Perhaps you have never read II Thess. 1:10 where Paul speaks of Jesus: "when He comes, in that day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe." Note the distinction; saints (separated ones) will be glorified; believers will admire. Or, consider Col. 3:4, "when Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in Glory." Is Jesus your very life? Does everything in your life revolve around Him? Has His love become a "consuming fire" in you, increasingly refining every thought, motive and desire? Then perhaps this promise of "appearing with Him in glory" can apply to you. As you read such promises, and many others, note the qualifying conditions given before you hastily include yourself.

[Relating Matured Sonship to the Prophetic Harvest Pattern]

I will deal briefly with just one more statement by Paul. In I Cor. 16:50 he declares that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." Notice that word "inherit." According to Jewish custom, inheritance was for a son who had "come of age;" who was given his portion of the Father's inheritance and thus became a joint-heir. When this time came, as appointed by the father (Gal. 4:1-2), the son (sometimes in a special ceremony) was officially acknowledged and given (or placed in) his inheritance. There is a special Greek word which Paul uses as the spiritual

counterpart for the sons of God. It is huiiothesia - a combination of *huios* (son) and *tithemi* (to place, appoint, ordain, put, or set forth). Unfortunately, the translators of the authorized (King James) version used the English word "adoption" to translate the Greek word. The concept, however, which Paul was seeking to convey when using this word in his epistles has nothing to do with adoption as we use it in our culture. Paul makes this clear in Rom. 8:23 where he states that we "who have the first fruits of the Spirit (through the Holy Spirit baptism), even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption (placing as a son), the redemption of our body." Thus it is something yet in the future. When that redemption (glorification) of the body takes place, then will fulfill Rom. 8:19.

Since "flesh and blood" cannot enter into that inheritance, it becomes evident that for those sons who become sufficiently purified, proven, and prepared, the "redemption of the body" refers to the glorification of the body, so that it becomes like to Christ's glorified body, able to function at will either in the heavenly realm or manifest as "flesh and bone" in the physical realm (Luke 24:39). So whether we see it in the metaphor of the harvest, where the grain must reach a certain stage of ripeness before it can be reaped, or in that of a son, who must reach a certain stage of maturity and responsibility before he can be placed in his inheritance, the truth is the same; God must do a work within those He is preparing to gather into the glory-realm.

What God is primarily after is PURITY; for it is the "pure in heart" who will see God (Mt. 5:3), and "without holiness no one will see the Lord" (He. 12: 14). The heart must be purged from the bondage to carnality. But there must also be a proving, with sufficient overcoming and mastery over self that equates to an "acceptable maturity." I use that terminology to distinguish it from an absolute maturity or perfection, for we will be growing towards the stature of the Father for many eons to come. But during this age, only those who have "come of age" as God sees it, can be "placed as sons" in the heavenly inheritance. This is the meaning of the words spoken of the firstfruits company in Rev. 14:5, that they are "without fault before the Throne of God."

Have you ever stopped to think that a glorified body is a powerful vessel or vehicle? Supposing you had a child 3 or 4 years old still riding a tricycle. Would you give that child the keys to your powerful automobile and tell him to use it whenever he wanted to? Stupid, you say. Well, not as stupid as claiming that all Christians, whether babes in Christ, children, or just plain carnal ones, are going to receive glorified bodies all at the same time. Absolute chaos would break out in the heavenly realm in a hurry if God did that.

[The Pre-Tribulation First Fruits in the Prophetic Harvest Pattern]

Let us now return to the “harvest pattern” and I will conclude this article with some final thoughts. In the pattern of Israel’s natural harvest it took the “latter rains” to insure a bounteous increase for reaping. However, for the barley crop, the intermittent rains and increasing warmth of late winter (especially at lower elevations) caused some barley heads to ripen before the heavy spring rains came in their fullness. Thus there were sufficient ripened barley heads to make up the first fruits wave sheaf to be offered at the time of the Passover feast. Even so will it be in the end time spiritual harvest. The first fruits will be translated and glorified BEFORE the full “latter rain” outpouring takes place. Hallelujah! All things will be conformed to the “harvest pattern” given by the ONE who is the FIRST and the LAST.

In. Zech. 10:1, the prophet admonishes: “ASK of the LORD rain in the time of the latter rain.” We must understand God’s strategy! Not until the Lord springs His SNARE or trap and unexpectedly translated the first fruits (who are “counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man,” Luke 21:34-36, Rev. 3:10), will the remaining church be SHOCKED TO ITS KNEES, crying out to God and ASKING for RAIN; for it will then be the TIME for the “latter rain.” And when it “falls” the real power of God will be manifest as never before in church history! Lord, hasten the day!

“And behold, I am coming quickly (suddenly, unexpectedly) and my reward is with me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the FIRST and the LAST.” (Rev. 22:12-13).

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly’ (suddenly unexpectedly). Amen. Even so come Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” Rev. 22:20-21.

Leland Earls

Concluded: 11/29/88

Note: All scripture quotations in this article are taken from The New King James Version, except where otherwise indicated.

[Ed. Post Script – As affirmed before the article, the Lord provided me other explanations capable of reconciling Paul’s statements on the rapture (which appear to teach only one all-inclusive event) with brother Leland’s teaching of a conditional two-phased rapture based in the prophetic harvest paradigm. I

later posited these explanations to him and he found them agreeable in addition to what he had presented here.

My first question regarded Paul's statement that "we shall all be changed" at the last trumpet, "in the twinkling of an eye." How can we all be changed at the same time like this if, as brother Earl's asserts, some will be changed before the tribulation and others afterward? What the Lord showed me however is that this question is based in a false assumption regarding the term "twinkling of an eye." The assumption is that the term "twinkling of an eye" demands simultaneous translation of all.

In truth, this assumption is unwarranted. The fact that we all shall be changed "in the twinkling of an eye" is not forced to mean that we are all changed "at once together in the SAME moment." Yes, we will all be changed "in a moment" of time. But it does not have to be the same moment for everyone. Some can be changed in an earlier moment, and others at a later moment. Everyone is still changed "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." Paul is emphasizing the instantaneous suddenness of the translation, not its point in time.

My second question regarded Paul's statement that the rapture does not occur until after the dead are first raised. How could a first fruits "sheaf" be translated before the dead are raised if this is to be so?

However, the Spirit drew my attention more carefully to Paul's words. He says that "we who are alive and remain shall not precede those who are asleep." I had always assumed that the phrase "and remain" was simply a redundant way of saying "alive." But actually, the words "and remain" allow for the possibility that some do not remain because they have already been translated! Subtle? Yes. Impossible? Not at all. The Spirit is in fact known to be very prophetically subtle. Now, brother Earl's interpreted the phrase "and remain" to refer to those who escape martyrdom during the tribulation. Also quite valid. The truth is that the Spirit is not limited to a single meaning in His words. Thus there is nothing in Paul's statement about the resurrection of the dead that precludes all possibility of any prior partial translation! As brother Earls would exclaim, "Hallelujah!"